



Mali

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

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Mali is a constitutional democracy that continued to implement a decentralized form of government. In May 2002, General Amadou Toumani Toure was elected to a 5-year term as President. The presidential and legislative elections were judged generally free and fair by international and domestic observers; however, there were some administrative irregularities. The former ruling party, Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA), lost its majority in the National Assembly, and no party held a clear majority. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, in practice, the executive branch continued to influence the judiciary.

Security forces are composed of the army, air force, Gendarmerie, National Guard, and police. While civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, there were a few instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently of government authority. The army and air force are under the control of the civilian Minister of Defense, as are the Gendarmerie and the National Guard. The police are under the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection. The police and gendarmes share responsibility for internal security; the police were in charge of urban areas only. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country was very poor with a market-based economy, and its population was approximately 11 million. Most of the work force was employed in the agricultural sector, particularly farming and animal husbandry. The per capita gross national product was approximately \$250, which provided most of the population with a low standard of living, although there was a sizable middle class. The economy depended heavily on foreign assistance. Desertification, deforestation, soil degradation, and social limitations, including a low literacy rate and a high population growth rate (2.4 percent), contributed to poverty. The inflation rate remained low, and public sector wages were adjusted to keep pace with inflation. Poor infrastructure, minimal foreign investment, administrative inefficiency, and corruption also were important factors in limiting economic growth.

The Government generally respected its citizens' human rights; however, there were problems in some areas. Prison conditions remained poor. Occasionally police arbitrarily arrested and detained persons. The judicial system's large case backlog resulted in long periods of pretrial detention and lengthy delays in trials. The judiciary continued to be subject to executive influence, and there were reports of corruption in the courts. Domestic violence against women was widespread. Discrimination against women persisted, and social and cultural factors continued to limit sharply economic and educational opportunities for most women. Female genital mutilation (FGM) was widespread, although educational campaigns against FGM were ongoing. Hereditary servitude relationships continued to link different ethnic groups. Child labor was common in the agricultural and domestic help sectors. Children were trafficked into forced labor in Cote d'Ivoire; the Government returned a number of these children to their families during the year.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

There were no new developments in the 2001 attack on the Gendarmerie Headquarters in Tarkint, or the 2001 killing of a bus driver.

Prison conditions were poor. Prisons continued to be overcrowded, medical facilities were inadequate, and food supplies were limited. Men and women were separated in Bamako prisons. Outside the capital, men and women remained housed in the same building but in separate cells. In Bamako, juvenile offenders usually were held in the same prison as adult offenders, but they were kept in separate cells. Pretrial detainees were held with convicted prisoners.

The Government permitted prison visits by human rights monitors. Several organizations, including the Malian Association of Human Rights, the Malian Association of Women Lawyers, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) visited prisoners and worked with women and juvenile prisoners to improve their conditions.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions; however, on occasion, police arrested and detained persons arbitrarily.

The national police force is organized into various divisions. Each district has a commissioner who reported to the Regional Director at national headquarters. The police force was moderately effective but had problems with lack of resources and training. Corruption existed within the police force.

Judicial warrants are required for arrest. Normally, the complainant delivered the warrant, which stipulated when the person was to appear at the police station. In some cases, the police served the warrant, based on a request from an influential relative of the complainant or if they received a bribe to execute the warrant. Frequently, in cases where a monetary debt was owed, the arrested person resolved the case at the police precinct, and the police received a portion of the recovered money.

The Constitution provides that suspects must be charged or released within 48 hours and that they are entitled to counsel; however, in practice, detainees were not always charged within the 48-hour period. Limited rights of bail or the granting of conditional liberty existed, particularly for minor crimes and civil matters. On occasion, the authorities released defendants on their own recognizance.

All of the 36 Pakistani preachers whom the police detained in 2001 for allegedly entering the country illegally were deported in 2002. The Government did not release a report on the Pakistani preachers by year's end.

Administrative backlogs and an insufficient number of lawyers, judges, and courts often caused lengthy delays in bringing persons to trial. In extreme cases, individuals remained in prison for several years before coming to trial. Local lawyers estimated that approximately half of prison inmates were pretrial detainees.

The Constitution specifically prohibits forced exile; the Government did not use it.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, the executive branch continued to exert influence over the judicial system. The Ministry of Justice appointed and had the power to suspend judges; it supervised both law enforcement and judicial functions. The President headed the Superior Judicial Council, which oversaw judicial activity. Domestic human rights groups alleged that there were instances of bribery and influence peddling in the courts. The Government continued its campaign against corruption. Although the Director of Telecommunications was convicted of corruption and sentenced to time served in April 2002, he subsequently was acquitted in January following an appeal of the case. The two cases remained under investigation at year's end.

The Supreme Court has both judicial and administrative powers. The Constitution provides for a separate Constitutional Court that oversees issues of constitutionality and acts as an election arbiter. The Constitution also

provides for the convening of a High Court of Justice with the power to try senior government officials in cases of treason.

Except in the case of minors, trials were public, and defendants have the right to be present and have an attorney of their choice. Defendants and attorneys had access to government evidence relevant to their cases. Defendants are presumed innocent and have the right to confront witnesses and to appeal decisions to the Supreme Court. Court-appointed attorneys were provided for the indigent without charge.

Village chiefs, in consultation with the elders, decided the majority of disputes in rural areas. If these decisions were challenged in court, only those found to have legal merit were upheld.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. Police searches were infrequent and required judicial warrants.

There were no reports of surveillance during the year.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

The Superior Council of Communication's primary function was to regulate the media, both protecting and controlling journalists. The Committee of Equal Access to State Media was activated during election campaigns. Mandated by the Constitution, it oversaw equal access to government-controlled media for all political parties.

There were 42 private newspapers and journals in French, Arabic, and local languages throughout the country; 39 were based in Bamako and 1 each in Timbuktu, Mopti, and Sikasso. All newspapers were required to register with the Ministry of Communications; however, registration was routine.

The Government controlled the only television station and 1 of more than 125 radio stations; however, all presented a wide range of views, including those critical of the Government. The relative expense of newspapers and television, coupled with a low literacy rate, made radio the most prevalent medium of mass information and communication. There were 15 private radio stations in Bamako, and there were approximately 110 additional stations throughout the country. In addition to commercial radio stations, private or community radio broadcasters included those run by associations and others directed toward smaller villages (the latter two radio services enjoyed special tax advantages).

A number of foreign broadcasters operated in Bamako through local media, including Radio France Internationale, Africa No. 1, and the British Broadcasting Corporation; all had frequency modulation (FM) frequencies. Voice of America had three local FM affiliates in Bamako, Segou, and Sikasso. Domestic reception and distribution of foreign satellite and cable television were permitted and fairly widespread, especially in Bamako. There were no private television stations that broadcast domestically produced programs.

The law regulates the press and provides for substantial criminal penalties, including imprisonment, for libel and for public injury to the Head of State, other officials, and foreign diplomats; these laws leave injury undefined and subject to judicial interpretation. However, the Government has never prosecuted journalists on criminal libel charges. In October, three reporters from a private radio station were jailed for 2 weeks on charges of defaming an attorney, in what was essentially a contempt of court proceeding. The Government referred to the affair as a dilemma and noted that it took no part in the incident.

The Government did not restrict access to the Internet. Licenses to operate Internet servers were granted freely, but were prohibitively expensive.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. The law requires groups that wish to hold public meetings to obtain the mayor's permission; however, such permission was granted routinely during the year.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The Government required that all public associations, including religious associations, register with the Government. The registration process was routine and was not burdensome. Traditional indigenous religions were not required to register.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice. Police routinely stopped and checked both citizens and foreigners to restrict the movement of contraband and to verify vehicle registrations. Some police and gendarmes used the occasion to extort bribes.

The law provides for the granting of refugee status or asylum to persons who meet the definition in 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status or asylum. A national committee in charge of refugees operated with institutional assistance from the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Government cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees.

According to both UNHCR and government estimates, there were approximately 11,000 Mauritanian refugees, mostly Fulani herders, living in the Kayes region in the western part of the country at year's end. However, the UNHCR, the Government, and Mauritania's Government have never agreed on recognition of the refugee status for these persons, who have lived in the country for more than a decade; members of these pastoralist border groups historically have made cross-border migrations. Mauritians could register for refugee status, although few actually did.

At year's end, the country hosted approximately 2,225 urban refugees: 66 percent were from Cote d'Ivoire and approximately 32 percent from Sierra Leone. Approximately 86 percent of the refugees were living in Bamako. The Government had a transit center located 120 miles from Bamako, where it hosted approximately 100 of the most vulnerable refugee and asylum applicants. The center had a capacity of approximately 300 persons and could be expanded to hold 900. The country received most of its refugees from Cote d'Ivoire and a small number from Liberia during the year.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

Under the Constitution, the President is Chief of State and Commander in Chief of the armed forces and is elected for a term of 5 years with a limit of two terms. The President appoints the Prime Minister, other members of the Government, and high military officers as mandated by the Constitution.

In May 2002, presidential elections were held, and General Amadou Toumani Toure won more than 60 percent of the vote even without the support of a political party. Independent international and domestic observers judged the elections to be generally free and fair and without evident fraud; however, there were some administrative irregularities. There were reports of abuses of the proxy voting system, problems in verifying identification of some voters, and efforts to influence some voters. Voter turnout reportedly was 30 to 35 percent. None of the opposition parties boycotted the election.

In July 2002, legislative elections were held that most independent observers considered to be generally free and without evident fraud; however, there were some administrative irregularities. Shifting alliances had an impact on

the composition of the National Assembly. The former majority party, ADEMA, held 37 of 147 seats (after losing 13 seats to the Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD)) in the National Assembly; the Rally for Mali (RPM) party and its allies held 65; and the remaining 26 seats were held by other smaller political parties and independents. No one party or coalition held a majority.

Local governments benefited from central government subsidies, but they also were able to collect local taxes to support their operations. Decentralization, which began in 1999, still was controversial. The process changed traditional power relationships between government and the governed, and relieved formerly powerful civil servants of their authority. The Government has passed many laws that allow greater financial autonomy in the areas of education, health, and infrastructure. Elected officials, especially in the southern regions, made some progress. However, in the lesser economically developed northern regions of the country, some mayors and other local officials were coping with difficulties stemming from revenue collection and local development programs. Effective service delivery strongly influenced citizens' perception and confidence in elected leaders and trust of government; however, local service delivery deteriorated where financial and administrative capacity was weak.

There were no restrictions, legal or otherwise, on voting or running for office by women or minorities. A total of 15 women held seats in the 147-member National Assembly. There were 4 female cabinet members in the 28 seat Cabinet. Five women served on the Supreme Court out of 33 justices, and 3 women served on the Constitutional Court out of 9 justices.

The National Assembly had 14 members of historically marginalized pastoralist and nomadic ethnic minorities representing the northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. The Cabinet also had a representative of the northern regions, the Prime Minister, who is a Tuareg.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Several independent domestic human rights organizations, such as the Malian Association for Human Rights, a smaller Malian League of Human Rights, and a local chapter of Amnesty International, generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials generally were cooperative and responsive to their views. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) had offices in Bamako, Timbuktu, and Gao.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on social origin, color, language, sex, or race and while the Government generally respected these provisions in practice, social and cultural factors gave men a dominant role.

Women

Domestic violence against women, including spousal abuse, was tolerated and common; no statistics were available on the extent of the problem. Assault in marriage was a crime; however, police were reluctant to enforce laws against or intervene in cases of domestic violence. Many women were reluctant to file complaints against their husbands because they were unable to support themselves financially.

The World Organization Against Torture reported that 24 percent of women married before the age of 15 years, and many were forced into marriages and polygyny.

FGM was common, especially in rural areas, and was performed on girls at an early age. According to domestic NGOs, approximately 95 percent of adult women had undergone FGM. The practice was widespread among most regions and ethnic groups, was not subject to class boundaries, and was not religiously based. There were no laws against FGM, and the Government did not propose legislation prohibiting FGM. In 1999, the Government instituted a two-phased plan to eliminate all forms of FGM by 2008. The first phase, scheduled for 1999-2004, was intended to be one of education. There was some public dissemination of information in urban areas, but the program continued to develop slowly. The National Committee Against Violence Towards Women linked all the NGOs active in preventing FGM, and various NGOs campaigned against FGM.

Women had very limited access to legal services due to their lack of education and information, and because family law favored men. Women particularly were vulnerable in cases of divorce, child custody, and inheritance rights, as well as in the general protection of civil rights. The Association of Malian Women Lawyers published a booklet on women's rights and held legal clinics to raise awareness of women's rights.

Despite legislation giving women equal rights regarding property, traditional practice and ignorance of the law prevented women from taking full advantage of the law. Prospective spouses chose between polygynous and monogamous marriages; a marriage could not take place without both parties' consent. However, when no preference was specified in the marriage certificate, judges assumed that the marriage was polygynous. A community property marriage had to be specified in the marriage contract. Traditional practice discriminated against women in inheritance matters. For example, men inherited most of the family wealth, and women received a much smaller portion of estates.

Women's access to employment in the professions and government, and to economic and educational opportunities, was limited. Women constituted approximately 15 percent of the labor force. The Government, the country's major employer, paid women the same as men for similar work. Women often lived under harsh conditions, especially in rural areas, where they performed difficult farm work and did most of the childrearing.

The first 4-year national plan of action for the promotion of women was completed in 2001. The plan, financed by national, regional, and local community budgets, sought to reduce inequalities between men and women in six target areas, including education, health, involvement in the decision-making process, and legal rights. The Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family started on a second 4-year action plan that was intended to continue programs started during the first action plan.

There were numerous active women's groups that promoted the rights of women and children.

Children

The Government was committed to providing for children's welfare and rights. Several laws protect children and provide for their welfare.

On June 2002, the Government enacted an ordinance enumerating the rights of children and establishing new government positions in each region, that of child "delegates," whose role would be to safeguard the rights and interests of children. The ordinance also created special courts for children and specified protections for children in the legal system. There was no juvenile court system.

Education was tuition free and, in principle, open to all, although the majority of students left school by the age of 12. Students had to provide their own uniforms and school supplies to attend public schools. While primary school was compulsory up to the age of 12, only 56 percent of children (46 percent of girls) received a basic education owing to a lack of primary schools, especially in rural areas where 80 percent of the population lived; shortages of teachers and materials; poverty; and cultural tendencies to place less emphasis on education of girls. Literacy rates among girls remained significantly lower than for boys. A 1998 report indicated that the national literacy rate was 12 percent for women more than 15 years of age.

There were reports that children who attended Koranic schools spent more time begging on the streets than learning in the classroom. The Koranic schools are independent institutions that depend on donations from parents, and the money the children (known as garibouts) receive from begging on the streets. They received no funding from the Government, and are not part of the Government's educational system. The Minister of Education, Mohamed Lamine Traore, admitted the problem and said that it is the responsibility of the Islamic leaders to modernize and monitor Koranic schools. Koran schoolteachers reported that they requested the Government's assistance in providing basic reading and writing materials.

The Social Services Department investigated and intervened in cases of reported child abuse or neglect. According to local human rights organizations, reported cases were rare; however, statistics were unreliable.

FGM was commonly performed on young girls (see Section 5, Women).

There were credible reports that children were sold and trafficked into forced labor in Cote d'Ivoire (see Section 6.f.).

Persons with Disabilities

There was no specific legislation protecting the rights of persons with physical or mental disabilities or mandating accessibility to public buildings. The Government did not discriminate against persons with physical disabilities in regard to employment, education, and other state services; however, the Government had not made provisions for

persons with disabilities in these areas. There was no societal discrimination against persons with disabilities; however, in view of the high unemployment rate, persons with physical disabilities often were unable to find work.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution and the Labor Code specifically provide for the freedom of workers to form or join unions and protect freedom of association, and workers exercised this right in practice. Only the military, the Gendarmerie, and the National Guard were excluded from forming unions. Virtually all-salaried employees were organized. According to the National Statistics Office, 28 percent of workers were salaried. Workers established independent unions for teachers, magistrates, health workers, and senior civil servants, and most were affiliated with the National Union of Malian Workers (UNTM) federation and the Syndicated Confederation of Malian Workers (CSTM). The UNTM and the CSTM, the two major labor federations, maintained their autonomy from the Government.

Neither the Constitution nor the Labor Code prohibits anti-union discrimination, but there were no reports of anti-union behavior or activities during the year.

Unions were free to associate with and participate in international bodies. The union representing salaried employees regularly participated in programs sponsored by French labor unions. Other unions participated in training programs on worker's rights.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The growth of independent unions led to more direct bargaining between these unions and their employers. However, wages and salaries for workers belonging to the UNTM and the CSTM were set by tripartite negotiations between the Ministry of Labor, labor unions, and representatives of the National Council of Employers of the sector to which the wages applied. Civil service salary levels were pegged nationally to an index established by the Government. These negotiations usually set the pattern for unions outside the UNTM. The Ministry of Labor has an office that deals with labor disputes and acted as a mediator in labor disputes between employers and employees.

The Constitution provides for the right to strike; however, there were restrictions in some areas. For example, civil servants and workers in state-owned enterprises were required to give 2 weeks' notice of a planned strike and enter into mediation and negotiations with the employer and a third party, usually the Ministry of Labor. The Labor Code prohibits retribution against strikers, and the Government generally respected this requirement in practice.

Several strikes, including by teachers, police officers, foreign service officers, and magistrates, occurred during the year. These strikes were settled within a few days.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see Sections 6.d. and 6.f.).

The law prohibits the contractual use of persons without their consent; penalties include a fine and hard labor. The penalties increase significantly if a minor, defined as someone less than 15 years of age, was involved.

There were some reports that the de facto slavery, long reported to have existed in northern salt mining communities, evolved to wage labor in recent years; however, reliable evidence about labor conditions in those remote facilities remained unavailable. Hereditary servitude relationships continued to link different ethnic groups, particularly in the north. For example, there was a hereditary service relationship between members of the Bellah ethnic group and other Tuareg populations.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The Labor Code has specific policies that pertain to child labor; however, these regulations often were ignored in practice and child labor was a problem. The Labor Code permits children between the ages of 12 and 14 to work up to 2 hours per day during school vacations with parental approval. Children between the ages of 14 and 16 may

work up to 4½ hours per day with the permission of a labor inspector, but not during nights, on Sundays, or on holidays. Children between the ages of 16 and 18 could work in jobs that physically were not demanding; boys could work up to 8 hours per day and girls up to 6 hours per day.

The vast number of children who worked in rural areas, helping with family farms and herds, and those who worked in the informal sector, for example, as street vendors were not protected by laws against unjust compensation, excessive hours, or capricious discharge.

Child labor predominated in the agricultural and domestic help sectors and, to a lesser degree, in craft and trade apprenticeships, and cottage industries. Apprenticeship, often in a family member's or a parent's vocation, began at an early age, especially for children unable to attend school.

The authorities enforced the Labor Code provisions through inspectors from the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service, who conducted surprise inspections and complaint-based inspections; however, resource limitations restricted the frequency and effectiveness of oversight by the Labor Inspection Service, and the Service operated only in the formal sector.

The National Campaign Against Child Labor in Mali, led by the International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC)-Mali, was responsible for investigating abusive forms of child labor. IPEC relied on labor inspectors appointed by the Government in Bamako and in regional offices throughout the country. Investigations were held when NGOs or the media provided information that there was abusive child labor. Government regional offices in charge of the promotion of women and children and NGOs also assisted IPEC in combating child labor.

There were reports that children were kidnapped, sold into effective slavery, and made to work on coffee and cocoa plantations in Cote d'Ivoire (see Section 6.f.). Some children were sold into forced labor by their parents; reportedly the children were beaten if they tried to escape. There were travel passes for children to try to prevent their being taken abroad to work illegally; however, the measure, still in effect, was criticized for leading to interference with legitimate travel.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Labor Code specifies conditions of employment, including hours, wages, and social security; however, in practice, many employers either ignored or did not comply completely with the regulations. The national minimum wage rate, set in 1994, was approximately \$43 (26,000 CFA francs) per month. Workers had to be paid overtime for additional hours. The minimum wage did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The minimum wage was supplemented by a required package of benefits, including social security and health care. While this total package could provide a minimum standard of living for one person, in practice, most wage earners supported large extended families and supplemented their income by subsistence farming or employment in the informal sector.

The normal legal workweek was 40 hours (45 hours for agricultural employees), with a requirement for at least one 24-hour rest period. The Social Security Code provides a broad range of legal protections against hazards in the workplace, and workers' groups brought pressure on employers to respect parts of the regulations, particularly those affecting personal hygiene. However, with high unemployment, workers often were reluctant to report violations of occupational safety regulations. The Labor Inspection Service of the Ministry of Labor oversaw these standards but limited enforcement to the modern, formal sector. It was not effective in investigating and enforcing workers' safety and was insufficiently funded for its responsibilities.

Workers had the right to remove themselves from dangerous work situations and request an investigation by the Social Security Department, which was responsible for recommending remedial action where deemed necessary; it was not known if any worker had done so.

The law protects legal and illegal foreign workers. Persons illegally in the country were not allowed to work; however, if they were given a job, they had the same protections as legal workers.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons but does specifically prohibit trafficking in children; however, children were trafficked for forced labor in Cote d'Ivoire. Child trafficking is punishable by 5 to 20 years in prison. There also were laws that prohibited the contractual use of persons without their consent. Penalties increased if a

minor was involved; however, these penalties were not imposed during the year.

Both the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family and the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service handled the problem of trafficking. Both ministries, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Territorial Administration, developed a program to identify and rehabilitate victims, educate the population, and strengthen the legal system with regard to the movement and trafficking of minors. Welcome centers in Mopti, Segou, Sikasso, and Bamako assisted child trafficking victims in returning to their families. Almoustapha Toure was the coordinator who specifically handled child trafficking issues, and whose office organized training sessions for law enforcement agents, labor inspectors, and the media; conducted awareness campaigns through radio and television; and held a workshop involving participants from the country, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire.

Children between the ages of 9 and 12 were sold into forced labor on cotton, coffee, and cocoa farms in northern Cote d'Ivoire over the past few years; some also were forced into domestic service. Organized networks of traffickers deceived the children and their families into believing that they would be given paid jobs outside of their villages. They then were sold to plantation owners for sums ranging between \$20 and \$40 (14,500 and 29,000 CFA francs). The children reportedly were forced to work 12 hours per day without pay, and often were abused physically.

The Government took some steps to halt child trafficking and repatriate children to the country from Cote d'Ivoire; however, there was no estimate of the number of children remaining in Cote d'Ivoire (see Section 6.d.). In 2001, more than 300 children were returned to their families from Cote d'Ivoire, in 2002, 58 children were returned, and, during the year, 34 children were returned. These numbers represent the number of children who were assisted at the welcome centers; children who returned home without first going through a welcome center were not counted. At year's end, 3 traffickers were arrested and charged in Sikasso versus approximately 10 in 2001. Investigations were ongoing in both cases and no information on trial dates was available at year's end.